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ABSTRACT

Group discussion and learning activities are featured in this paper, the ninth in a series of resources for community development groups. The introduction defines the nature and goals of "core groups"--small community groups that will discuss the possibilities of individual and community transformation and promote new, life-enhancing patterns of growth. The text is organized under three areas of knowledge about communities, each with background information, suggestions for group learning activities, and discussion of possible outcomes for each activity. Part 1, "What Is a Community?" emphasizes the bonds that are essential to a community. Learning activities include naming communities that do not share a geographical location and identifying the bonds that unify these groups. Activities in Part 2, "Assessing Your Community," ask participants to describe how they feel when they think about trying to improve their community, to describe the community from the perspective of various groups (mothers, elders, firemen, school board members, etc.), and to identify the numerous sub-groups to which they belong. The focus of Part 3, "Helping Your Community," is the unifying forces in communities and the role of influential members. The learning activity has participants identify influential community members and their spheres of influence. (JHZ)

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The Four Worlds Development Project is the result of many people's efforts and wisdom. Some were directly involved, others inspired us through their work in education and alcohol and drug abuse prevention.

Direction for this project was set at a conference held in Lethbridge, Alberta in December, 1982. Participants at the conference were native elders, spiritual leaders and professionals of various native communities in North America. Their contributions were framed by their deep commitment to native people and their own, often hard won, experience. To each of them we offer our deepest respect and appreciation.

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Editorial note:

In English it is impossible to refer to a person without using a pronoun that indicates gender or sex (e.g. he or she, him or her, his or hers). Since there is no special word to refer to a person whose gender is not known, most writers have chosen to use the masculine form in these situations.

This custom of using the masculine form when referring to a person who is not known to be a female, has caused a conspicuous absence of reference to women in English writing.

Thus all of the great ideas and discoveries discussed in English literature are expressed in masculine terms and the reader constantly visualizes males, rather than females, as active participators in the world. Our society's tendency to devalue the role and contributions of women is only augmented by this lack of picturing women in an active creative role.

The Four Worlds Development Project has chosen to alternate the use of feminine and masculine pronouns whenever the reference is unspecific. This choice of usage is a deliberate one to avoid the the awkwardness of the compound form (he/she; him or her) while at the same time acknowledging the harmful consequences of bowing to a convention that persistently forces its audience to visualize the world as dominated by men and operating on ideas expressed in masculine terms.

Introduction

This series of discussion papers has been especially designed for small community groups; we call these "core groups". Our aim is that as people learn more about themselves and their community, they will want to get involved in creating new options, new patterns of personal and community dynamics, and in short, in promoting the ongoing process of human development in themselves and their community.

The core of anything is the heart and center of that thing. The core of a human development process is the people who, by their unity of vision, their personal commitment to growth and their leadership (by example) form the pattern around which other people cluster as positive changes take place in the community.

The Four Worlds Project promotes the development of core groups which will engage in discussion on the possibility of individual and community transformation, and conduct action-oriented research on aspects of personal and community life. It is anticipated that this group will, in some sense, establish new structural patterns around which the life of the community can organize itself--patterns that are more life-preserving, life-enhancing and development-promoting than those currently being utilized.

The core group, as it gains clarity of vision and takes action on that vision, will attract others who will also participate in the learning-transformation process. The fundamental strategic problem is not whether core groups can have such an influence. That they can is an established fact in a wide variety of case studies on social change. The challenge is twofold. The first problem is to tease out of obscurity and isolation in any community of learners those individuals who are in some way already facilitators of the organic change process in the community. The second task is to unite the hearts of these individuals in a common vision of human possibility that transcends social and political barriers to positive understanding and collaboration.

It is with the goal of helping individuals and communities face these two challenges that this discussion series was prepared. Accept them as your own and use them in whatever way you feel will be appropriate and effective.

We envision a process in which a group facilitator helps the group go through the text together, stopping frequently to discuss the points that are made. The activities and discussion questions can be used to help review what has been learned, to explore some aspects of the discussion more fully, and to apply what you have learned to your own situation and community. Much of the material can be read aloud (either by the facilitator or by various members of the

study group in turn) so that people are not limited by their reading ability in their efforts to understand the material. We anticipate that a natural outcome of this discussion process will be that the group will decide to take action in the community.

This series is just an experiment. It is not meant to be a final product. Let us know what you think, what you liked and what you didn't, and what helped you learn and what didn't. During the next year we hope to develop a set of video tapes to go with the series and maybe produce some more discussion papers to develop some of the ideas further. We need you to help us make this project a success.

The movement is not building privilege or bureaucracy. It is not a nostalgic return to the past. People are taking their fate into their own hands and realizing the political maturity that grows out of direct action, and immediate involvement.

Every village and group will find its own form, take its own action and speak its own language. Through the recently established Regional Elder's Council villages will express themselves in harmony. We have taken the first steps to build a stronger and more viable Inupiat society.

After hearing all this you can numb your senses with liquor and drugs or go home and watch TV. Look at the deadly love-making and violence on the screen. Is it better than real life? Make up your mind to learn to live.

When the advertisements come on walk into the night. Look inward. Peel aside all the external messages and find the message of Inupiat Ilitqusiat.

Stay awhile in the street. Look at your neighbors passing by and say to yourself: the last word has not been said. Then act. Act with others, not for them. Close the chasm between fate and will. Learn the Inupiat values. Teach them. Make Inupiat Ilitqusiat happen here and now. It is your own.

Inupiat Ilitqusiat draws up a nearly definitive agenda for the forthcoming trial of Inupiat identity, for it is clear that a form of civilization is in suspense about its own survival and even its right to survive. Somehow that survival depends on our ability to restore our traditional values and take on our responsibilities to ourselves and to others.

In sharp contrast to a previous decade's struggle for traditional land rights, a struggle which became economic and political, Inupiat Ilitqusiat is social and cultural, so that people can become themselves. An entire society is embraced within its scope because Inupiat society is implosive: everybody is involved with everybody.

John Christensen (from Inupiat Iliqusiat: To Save Our Land and Our People)

PART 1 - WHAT IS A COMMUNITY?

What is your community? Is it just a place--a dot on a map, or a group of buildings somewhere along a road or beside a river or lake, some people and houses? One way of looking at your community is as a cluster of people and buildings, but that's not all your community is. It is much, much more than that. A community can be described as a group of people with something in common. This discussion paper will help you learn a few things about your community and how you can help it improve.

Most people think of a community as a group of people who live together in the same place. In fact, the members of a community don't even have to live near each other. It is possible, for example, to have an "artistic community" of painters and sculptors who live in many different towns and cities in many countries of the world. There are communities which are made up of groups of people who have many things in common, even though they don't live near each other.

EXERCISE 1

Name three other communities that have something in common but don't share a common piece of geography.

DISCUSSION

Answers could include athletes, country and western

musicians, healers, alcohol workers, and many other widely dispersed groups of people who are bound or linked together through some common activity or interest. Each of these communities could also have several smaller communities within it. The community of alcohol workers, for instance, could have within it a smaller group of people who work in treatment centers, another concerned primarily with the problems of youth, and yet another working with the education system to develop alcohol and drug abuse prevention curriculum.

In each of the above examples of smaller groups or communities within the larger community of alcohol workers, the individual members of these communities could live many thousands of miles apart, yet they would consider themselves to be part of a group of people with something in common, part of a community. They would communicate with each other, try to help each other, and otherwise be linked together by a web or network of mutual interest and support.

EXERCISE 2

Try to name and describe the bonds or linkages that make each of the groups you identified in exercise 1 a community. What do they share that binds them together, that helps them identify themselves as part of their group?

DISCUSSION

For the communities selected, try to describe how the members feel about the others members of their community, and compare these feelings with the relationship a community member might have with someone outside his community. For example: someone who is a hunter and trapper might be very friendly with his neighbour, who could be a school teacher. Their children might play together, they could have alot in common, but there would be things the hunter couldn't share with the teacher. There would be a special sense of brotherhood among the members of the hunting and trapping community, based on some very deeply held beliefs and values, which he couldn't share with his school teacher neighbour, no matter how much he liked her. This lack of sharing could be based on the schoolteacher's inability to fully appreciate the hunter's way of looking at the world--she has not had the same experiences or developed the same skills.

So, even though they are neighbours, the school teacher couldn't be considered to be part of that same widely dispersed, yet closely knit, community of hunters. They live side-by-side but are not members of the same community in terms of their occupations. And yet, they are neighbours, and share many other things in common. They live close together, their children attend the same school, and they probably belong to some of the same organizations. So, in

another sense they are part of the same community, a community quite different from the widely dispersed community of alcohol workers discussed earlier. They are bound together by another set of common interests, a web of caring and support based on other aspects of their lives, in a community just as real as the community of alcohol workers or the community of hunters. The alcohol worker or hunter, then, is part of more than one community--he identifies with the other members of his profession, but also with his neighbours. Likewise, the schoolteacher, his neighbour, is a member of several communities. She lives in a certain town, a dot on a map, but she's linked with many other people both within her community and with people who live elsewhere with whom she has some common interest.

Exercise 3

Consider the following questions: Is a community just a group of people who happen to live in the same place? Are all the people who live in one place members of only that community?

DISCUSSION

Hopefully, by discussing the above examples, you will be able to discover and describe some of the social and psychological linkages that create the bonds that are the essential ingredients of a community.

PART 2: ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNITY

It should be clear by now that a community is more than a group of people that happen to live together, more than a dot on a map and a bunch of houses and people clumped together beside a lake or river.

These things, the material or geographical factors, are part of what makes up a community, but there are other things that are probably more important. There are other things that bind people together, such as a common interest, a desire to help each other progress, or some other strong social, psychological or spiritual bond. It is often these other, less-visible things that are the most important factors to consider when trying to find ways to help your community.

Many people who try to do some sort of community work soon find that they become confused, or overwhelmed, by the amount of information about their communities they have to deal with. When they look at their community, they see many pieces and parts, but they don't see how these are all connected to each other. When looked at in this way, the community is a complex jumble of groups, structures and activities. It is hard to know where to begin.

Exercise 1

Describe how you feel when you think about trying to improve your community. If you have experience as a community worker, describe how you felt when you were given your first community-development type job? Did you feel you knew where to begin? Did you know exactly what to do and where it was all going? Did your boss know what to tell you so you could do a good job?

DISCUSSION

It is likely that there will be different types of responses to this question. Those of you who have worked for some time without qualified, well-trained supervisors will probably have a lot to say about this issue, especially if you feel comfortable with the other members of your study class (i.e. if you have a sense of community among you). Those of you who have not held field-level counselling, administration, or community development type jobs will respond differently. You probably won't be able to relate as well to the discussion because of a relative lack of personal experience.

You can help your discussion by thinking about questions such as, "If you were given a budget of $100,000 a year for the next three years to spend on improving your community,

what would you do with it?" "Why would you spend it on that, and not on something else?" "How would that benefit other parts of the community?"

One of the common problems described by village level workers is that they don't really know where to begin and what they should do. This part of this course, and the other classes, will hopefully help people deal with this sense of confusion.

If you want to help your community progress, one of the things that might help you to fulfill this desire is the ability to look at your community from a particular point of view; that is, to do a community profile.

A community profile is a way of looking at your community from a particular angle or view-point. The word profile is defined in the dictionary as "an outline, as seen from one side". Each member of a community has her own view of it; she sees her community from her own particular side. Let's discuss a few examples:

Exercise 2

How do you think the following people see their community? What parts of the community do you think stand out most clearly for them?

1. The people in charge of road maintenance

2. The people who look after the town's electrical distribution system
3. The garbage disposal crew
4. The fire department
5. The building maintenance department
6. Members of the council
7. Members of the school committee (Board)
8. Teenagers
9. Mothers
10. Elders

If we were able to take one person from each of these categories and put them all in a car and drive around the community, what would each notice? They would all be driving along the same streets, looking at the same town. Would they see the same community?

EXERCISE 3

Place six chairs in 2 rows of 3 in the center (or front) of the room, like the seats in a car. Ask six people to occupy these chairs, one to be the driver, and each of the others to pretend they are one of the people listed above. Tell them they are driving through the community, and have them all talk, at the same time, about what interests them in what they are seeing as they go along the street.

DISCUSSION

In the exercise above, the people were all on the same street or road in the same community. Did they notice the same things? Would they identify with, feel part of, or be concerned about the same things?

There would probably be a number of things in common, but there would also be alot of differences. Each person would see the town through her own eyes, from her own side, or point of view. Have each passenger report what she noticed. Note and discuss the common and different things the different passengers saw. Then discuss how other people, like nurses, politicians, grandparents, child welfare workers and ministers would look at a community.

The foregoing has been an exercise to look at the different physical views or profiles a community can have. Now, let's look at the different social profiles there can be in a community. It would probably be easiest to begin with the fire department noted above.

The members of the fire department, even volunteer fire brigades in a small town, all have something in common. When they get together, they talk about trucks, pumps, hoses and other fire-fighting equipment, and share stories about fires they have fought. All of these things are related to their common identity.

They probably also talk about other things too, like sports, girls (or possibly men--there are women fire-fighters, too!) and fast cars. These other topics or interests would probably also be discussed by a group of road maintenance workers as they met at coffee break to talk over their day's work.

These road maintenance workers, bound together in a small group by a common interest in their jobs and the condition of the town's roads, could be considered to be a community. So could the fire-fighters. Each group has a set of interests, or views of the town, that unites them in some common activity. They also have some other things that they share with other groups, such as a common interest in sports, girls (or men), and fast cars, that creates a wider bond, a larger group that forms, in a sense, another more loosely knit community within the town.

There are possibly some other people in town who aren't particularly interested in discussing sports, girls (or men) and fast cars, who could be considered not to be members of that community, even though they live in the same town. Some of these people might even be part of the fire department or roads maintenance crews, and have that common interest to bond them with others, but they wouldn't feel themselves to be part of the other, more widely dispersed group that is interested in discussing sports and so forth.

So, in that town there might be many different groups, or sub-communities, and any individual in town can belong to some or many of these communities. Anyone who is part of one community might not share all the ideals and common interests of his fellow community members, and might not be part of the other groups they are in. Each person sees the whole community from his own vantage point.

There are many different sides from which a community can be looked at, and each profile might look different for each member of the community. A community profile, then, can be drawn from any one of many viewpoints of the community, and can reflect the interests and current conditions of whoever is drawing it. A community profile is different for every group or set of associations or linkages an individual has, and at any given time the same community might look entirely different to an individual. What is important, however, is that a community worker be able to take a look at a community from the side or point of view that is useful for the work that needs to be done to help the community progress.

EXERCISE 4

Form smaller groups of three to five, and list, in about ten minutes, the groups or sub-communities you each are part of in your home town or elsewhere. Then have each group report to the class. Have you ever before thought of

yourselves as being part of so many communities? Did you realize that your community has such a variety of groups in it? Try to describe what it is that makes you part of your group or community. What are those things that bind people together into a group or community?

PART 3 - HELPING YOUR COMMUNITY

We've discussed the idea that communities are formed when people are united by something they have in common. We have also discussed that there could be many smaller sub-communities in every town or village, and that people can belong to several communities at once. What is most important about communities is the bonding, the feeling of common interest among their members.

It is this feeling of togetherness that forms the core of a community, and it is this very important unifying force that you can work with to help your community.

There is also another important thing about groups or communities: in each group of people there are always a few people whom the others listen to. Most of the members of a group or community will pay attention to one or a few older, more skilled, or more experienced members of their group, and try to do things the way these few people do them.

These two things about groups: (1) the bond or unifying

force that keeps them together, and (2) the fact that most groups have members that are more influential than the rest, are very important things to understand if you want to help your community.

EXERCISE 1

Form smaller groups of three to five, and discuss these two points: (1) Who do you listen to, or pay attention to in relation to various topics (such as how to raise children, how to be healthy, how to get a job, how to learn certain skillful things)? (2) Who else listens to, and takes advice from these people on these topics?

Have each group report on its discussion to the class. Can you begin to see that your community is several things: a cluster of people living in an area, and a set of interpersonal relationships that binds different people into smaller groups or communities, all living together within their town or village? Think about your community as a set of influences, a cluster of social bonds or common interests that tie people together.

Discussion

To understand this better, we could compare a community to an electrical system. Such a system consists of wires, poles, plugs in the walls of homes, lightbulbs, a generator, and many other parts. These different parts can be seen as

the different individuals living in a town. Unless there is electricity in the wires to make the toasters and the lights work, the system is useless. It doesn't accomplish anything. In human terms, the people are like the wires and poles and fixtures. What is needed to make the group useful, to have it accomplish anything, is something like the energy in the electrical system's wires. It is the unifying, co-operative bonding that comes about when people care for each other and have some common interest or purpose that makes a group of people a community. Without this caring, there is no togetherness. There is no community. People could be living within five feet of each other, and pass each other several times a day, as is often the case with people living in high-rise apartments in big cities, but there is no connection, no bond, and they're strangers living alone within just a few feet of their neighbours.

Your job as a community worker or as a concerned community member would be easier if people would work together in some common purpose. You can help this happen if you take a close look at your community. Look at the people, and then look <u>also</u> at the web of influences, the bonds of common interests that tie these people together. If you can begin to strengthen these common bonds, if you can help the few more influential members of each community or smaller group in your town to advise the rest in a way which will help your community progress, you will be helping your

Love is something you and I must have.
We must have it because our spirit
feeds upon it. We must have it because
without it we become weak and faint.
Without love our self-esteem weakens.
Without it our courage fails. Without
love we can no longer look out confidently
at the world. Instead we turn inwardly
and begin to feed upon our own personalities
and little by little we destroy ourselves.

You and I need the strength and joy that
comes from knowing we are loved. With it
we are creative. With it we march tirelessly.
With it, and with it alone, we are able to
sacrifice for others.

Chief Dan George (Coast Salish)

community. Look for the unifying forces in your community. Encourage them and strengthen them by contributing your own energy and skills. In this way you will be strengthening the foundation of an authentic community development process.

Questions to think about:

1. Think about your study class as a community of people concerned about the well-being of the people.

    a. What is the unifying force that binds you together?

    b. How can these bonds be strengthened?

    c. Does this community within your larger community help each person feel an accepted part of the group?

    d. Does it help each individual develop leadership capacities so that he or she can better help the people?

    e. How can your group improve its capacity to support and educate its own members, as well as the members of the community at large?

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